



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 15, 2005

Ms. Karen Rabon
Assistant Attorney General
Public Information Coordinator
Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

OR2005-02205

Dear Ms. Rabon:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 220207.

The Office of the Attorney General (the "OAG") received a request for David Boatright's personnel file. The OAG has released most of the information but asserts that some of the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.102, 552.117, 552.130, and 552.136 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the submitted sample of information.¹

Section 552.101 excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. Section 552.101 encompasses information made confidential by statutes. Employment Eligibility Verification, Form I-9, is governed by title 8, section 1324a of the United States Code, which provides that the form "may not be used for purposes other than for enforcement of this chapter" and for enforcement of other federal statutes governing crime and criminal investigations. 8 U.S.C. § 1324a(b)(5); *see* 8 C.F.R. § 274a.2(b)(4). Release of this document under the Public Information Act would be "for purposes other than for

¹We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

enforcement” of the referenced federal statutes. Accordingly, we conclude that Form I-9 is confidential under section 552.101 and may only be released in compliance with the federal laws and regulations governing the employment verification system.

Section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code provides that tax return information is confidential. Employee W-4 forms are excepted from disclosure by section 6103(a) of title 26 of the United States Code. Open Records Decision No. 600 (1992). Thus, the W-4 forms must be withheld.

In addition, the OAG asserts private financial information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.102 of the Government Code. Information must be withheld under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy if the information is highly intimate or embarrassing and it is of no legitimate concern to the public. *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976), *cert. denied*, 430 U.S. 931 (1977). Section 552.102 excepts from disclosure “information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” Gov’t Code § 552.102(a). In *Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Tex. Newspapers*, 652 S.W.2d 546 (Tex. App.—Austin 1983, writ ref’d n.r.e.), the court ruled that the test to be applied to information claimed to be protected under section 552.102 is the same as the test formulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* for information claimed to be protected under the doctrine of common-law privacy as incorporated by section 552.101. *See Indus. Found.*, 540 S.W.2d at 683-85. Accordingly, we will consider your section 552.101 and section 552.102 claims together.

This office has found that personal financial information not relating to the financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body is excepted from required public disclosure under common-law privacy. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 600 (1992) (federal tax Form W-4, Employee’s Withholding Allowance Certificate; designation of beneficiary of employee’s retirement benefits; direct deposit authorization; and forms allowing employee to allocate pretax compensation to group insurance, health care or dependent care), 545 (1990) (deferred compensation information, mortgage payments, assets, bills, and credit history), 523 (1989). However, information concerning financial transactions between an employee and a public employer is generally of legitimate public interest. *Id.* Therefore, financial information relating to retirement benefits must be disclosed if it reflects the employee’s mandatory contributions to the state retirement system. Open Records Decision No. 600 (1992). On the other hand, information is excepted from disclosure if it relates to a voluntary investment that the employee made in an option benefits plan offered by the OAG. *Id.* Except for the information we have marked, we agree the OAG must withhold the private information it has marked pursuant to sections 552.101 and 552.102.

Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from required public disclosure the home address, telephone number, social security number, and information revealing whether a former employee has family members if the public employee requested that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Therefore, section 552.117 requires

the OAG to withhold this information if the former employee requested that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 622 (1994), 455 (1987). The OAG may not, however, withhold this information of the former employee who made the request for confidentiality under section 552.024 after the request for information was made. Whether a particular piece of information is public must be determined at the time the request for it is made. Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Here, the former employee timely elected to withhold his section 552.117 information. Thus, the OAG must withhold the section 552.117 information it has marked.

Section 552.130 of the Government Code provides in relevant part:

(a) Information is excepted from the requirement of Section 552.021 if the information relates to:

- (1) a motor vehicle operator's or driver's license or permit issued by an agency of this state; [or]
- (2) a motor vehicle title or registration issued by an agency of this state[.]

The OAG must withhold the Texas motor vehicle information it has marked under section 552.130.

Lastly, section 552.136 of the Government Code states that "[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential." Gov't Code § 552.136. The OAG must, therefore, withhold the bank account number it has marked under section 552.136.

In summary, the OAG must withhold the I-9 and W-4 forms in their entirety under federal law. The OAG must withhold the private information under sections 552.101 and 552.102; the employee's home address, home telephone number, social security number, and family information under section 552.117(a)(1); the Texas motor vehicle information under section 552.130; and the bank account number under section 552.136. The OAG must release the remaining information.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by

filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

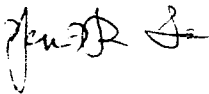
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Yen-Ha Le
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

YHL/sdk

Ref: ID# 220207

Enc: Marked documents

c: Ms. Carol Davis
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(w/o enclosures)